EAST DAVIES ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OR-03-025-043

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
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January 28, 2005

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The East Davies Allotment (#5223) is located 36 miles southeast of Burns, Oregon. The legal description is T. 26 S., R. 34 E., T. 26 S., R. 35 E.; and T. 27 S., R. 35 E. (see vicinity map and range improvement map for allotment location).

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being tiered to the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) issued in September 1992.

The following documents guide management of the public land on the East Davies Allotment: The Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management on Public Lands in Oregon and Washington approved on August 12, 1997, the ROD for the Three Rivers RMP/EIS issued in September 1992, and the East Davies evaluation completed January 12, 2004.

The Burns District Office conducted monitoring on the East Davies Allotment from 1994 to 2002. On January 12, 2004, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed the East Davies Allotment evaluation which: 1) summarized current management in the allotment, 2) determined whether or not adequate progress is being made toward achieving the multiple-use objectives and whether standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock grazing management were met, and 3) provided recommendations for future management of the allotment.

A. Purpose

On January 12, 2004, the BLM completed the East Davies Allotment evaluation. Through the evaluation it was determined that the monitoring data indicated downward trend in range condition within the Lower Pasture. Therefore, the BLM is recommending changing grazing management within the East Davies Allotment to meet multiple-use objectives, and achieve the standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock management. The recommended management is likely to result in upward trend in range condition on the East Davies Allotment.

B. Need

The need for the proposed management plan is to ensure that livestock grazing on public land achieves the standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock grazing management and the following allotment objectives:

1. Increase the percent ground cover of perennial vegetation and maintain or increase the percent composition of key herbaceous species of bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber's needlegrass, crested wheatgrass, and sagebrush species within the Lower Pasture.

2. Maintain or increase the percent ground cover and percent composition by frequency of bluebunch wheatgrass and Thurber's needlegrass in the Balkan Basin and Reservoir Pastures.

3. Maintain or increase existing cover of bitterbrush in the Balkan Basin and Reservoir Pastures on public land.

Note: Ground cover is the percentage of ground surface covered by vegetation. Composition is the proportion of species in the community.

C. Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

This proposed action and all other alternatives are in compliance with management direction established in the ROD for the Three Rivers RMP/Final EIS) (Chapter 2, Grazing Management, September 1992). This EA is also in compliance with Federal, State, tribal, and local laws, regulations, and land use plans.

CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to implement a new East Davies Allotment Management Plan (AMP), as described below:

Table 1. Displays the Public and Private Acreages for the East Davies Allotment

	Public Acres	Private Acres	State Acres	Total Acres
Lower	688	74	100	862
Balkan Basin	838	402	0	1,240
Reservoir	224	210	0	434
Head of Beaver Creek	10	415	0	425
East Davies Pasture	188	2,454	0	2,642
TOTAL ACRES	1,948	3,555	100	5,603

1. Livestock Stocking Rates

Table 2 displays the pastures, recommended active permitted use, exchange of use, and stocking levels.

Table 2. AUMs

Pasture	Recommended Active Permitted AUMs	Exchange of use AUMs	Temporary Non-Renewable AUMs	Total Stocking Levels on Public and Private Lands AUMs
Lower	45	8	123	176
Balkan Basin	36	58	0	94
Reservoir	28	38	13	79
Head of Beaver Creek	1	0	0	1
East Davies Pasture	18	0	0	18
TOTALS	128	104	136	368

The Burns District is proposing that the permitted active use be increased to 128 AUMs with the exchange of use to be 104 AUMs. This would be a permanent increase to permitted active use of 18 AUMs. The reason for this increase of 18 AUMs is that there is approximately 188 acres of public land within the East Davies Pasture that was not previously allocated. The permittee may apply for Temporary Non-Renewable (TNR) use, annually, for up to 136 AUMs within the allotment. Approval would depend on growing season conditions and maintaining utilization in each pasture at 50 percent or below. This would allow the permittee to graze up to 368 AUMs in the East Davies Allotment.

Rationale: The reason for the above recommendation is that the total carrying capacity calculation for the East Davies Allotment is 548 AUMs with the average actual use being 352 AUMs. The average actual use by pasture through this evaluation has been:

Lower Pasture – 179 AUMs
Balkan Basin Pasture – 94 AUMs
Reservoir Pasture – 79 AUMs

(The Head of Beaver Creek Pasture has 10 acres of public land, therefore, has no actual use records.)

The monitoring data shows that there has only been one year where utilization was heavy and that was in the Balkan Basin Pasture during 1997. All other years were light to moderate grazing, which were at or below the desired utilization levels. Also, the trend in range condition within the Reservoir and Balkan Basin Pastures is stable. The southern portion of the Lower Pasture has a downward trend with the northern portion estimated to be in stable trend.

2. Grazing System

Prior to the start of each grazing year, the permittee would submit an annual grazing application, which would include requested stocking rates by pasture, and specific season (up to 6 weeks within each pasture) which would be grazed within the general season of use. This application would be reviewed and any use authorized would be in conformance with the East Davies AMP. The permittee is required to implement appropriate actions (i.e., riding, herding, and salting) to ensure that livestock management accomplishes allotment objectives and is in conformance with the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management on Public Lands in Oregon and Washington approved on August 12, 1997.

The permittee is planning on sealing two reservoirs with bentonite that are on private land: T. 26 S., R. 35 E., Section 31 and T. 27 S., R. 35 E., Section 5. This should improve water capacity within the Reservoir and Balkan Basin Pastures. The grazing plan would be implemented immediately, with no interim plan needed. The grazing system is designed to ensure the attainment of the allotment objectives, but if it is determined that the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management on Public Lands in Oregon and Washington are not being met and livestock are determined to be a causal factor, management changes would be made as necessary prior to the start of the next grazing season.

Table 3. Displays the General Season of Use by Pasture for the East Davies Allotment

Grazing System for the East Davies Allotment with a 50% Utilization Objective				
Pasture	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Lower*	09/01 – 03/31	04/01 – 05/01	09/01 – 03/31	09/01 – 03/31
Balkan Basin	04/01 – 07/15	04/01 – 07/15	09/01 – 03/31	09/01 – 03/31
Reservoir	09/01 – 03/31	09/01 – 03/31	04/01 – 07/15	04/01 – 07/15
Head of Beaver Creek		03/01 – 12/31 general season		

The livestock would only be allowed to graze within the Lower, Balkan Basin, and Reservoir Pastures up to 6 weeks within the general season of use shown in the table above.

* The Lower Pasture is split by an electric fence; the permittee would manage the pasture as two pastures. One out of every 4 years the permittee would be allowed to graze livestock during the spring to fit his livestock operation.

* The Head of Beaver Creek Pasture would be managed with the permittee's private land, because there are only 10 acres of public land within this pasture.

Rationale: The Lower Pasture was not fully meeting the allotment-specific objective. Use occurring from April to August resulted in poor livestock distribution causing light to severe utilization patterns. The proposed grazing system is composed of 3 years of fall/winter grazing with 1-year of spring grazing. Winter grazing is expected to improve livestock distribution with animals grazing the upper benches and bottoms which would result in an improved utilization pattern throughout the pasture. By grazing livestock during the winter months the key perennial grass species would have the opportunity to set seed and store food (carbohydrates) which would allow the plant to maintain the capacity to produce both shoot and root growth the next year. The livestock would also prepare a seedbed and work seed into the soil.

Livestock grazing in the Balkan Basin and Reservoir Pastures would occur April 1 to July 15 for two consecutive years followed by 2 years of fall/winter grazing. This grazing system would allow an opportunity for maintaining or improving the perennial grass species. When livestock are grazing during spring/summer season there would be minimal use on bitterbrush. During the fall/winter grazing season utilization of bitterbrush should not exceed 65 percent utilization by both livestock and wildlife. This would ensure the objective of maintaining current bitterbrush cover/density is met. If rangeland monitoring determines cattle utilization have a negative effect on the bitterbrush stands, exclusion of cattle through fencing or change in season of use would be implemented.

This grazing system would ensure that the multiple-use objectives for the East Davies Allotment are met.

3. Flexibility

A 5-day flexibility period from the outlined move dates (i.e., 5 days prior to and/or 5 days after) would be allowed without prior approval from the Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager, as long as the total number of days licensed are not exceeded.

4. Other Management Actions

a. Range Improvement Projects

(1) Reseeding in the Lower Pasture

The Lower Pasture would be reseeded in areas where the original seeding was unsuccessful. The purpose of this seeding maintenance would be to provide a perennial plant community that would reduce the potential establishment and spread of noxious weeds. These noxious weeds include patches of diffuse knapweed, whitetop, perennial pepperweed, and medusahead rye.

b. Noxious Weeds

The allotment would be monitored for noxious weeds. New and existing weed infestations would be treated using the most appropriate methods. Noxious weed management would occur in accordance with the Burns District Office Noxious Weed Program EA OR-020-98-05.

c. Cultural Resources and American Indian Concerns and Traditional Cultural Properties

If National Register eligible cultural properties are found in the allotment or if tribal governments raise concerns, mitigation measures may have to be completed.

B. No Action Alternative

This alternative would maintain the current grazing management on the East Davies Allotment. The current grazing system is on a 3-year rotation, summarized as follows:

Lower: early-graze-early
Balkan Basin: graze-defer-defer
Reservoir/Head of Beaver: defer-rest-graze

Table 4. Current Grazing System

Pasture	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Lower	04/01 - 04/30	05/01 - 06/30	04/01 - 04/30
Balkan Basin	05/01 - 06/30	07/01 - 08/01	07/01 - 08/01
Reservoir	07/01 - 08/01	Rest	05/01 - 06/30

The total number of AUMs of permitted use as per the term permit is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. AUMs

Permittee	Active Use AUMs	Suspended Nonuse AUMs	Exchange of Use	Total Permitted Use AUMs	Total Use AUMs
Martin Davies	110	0	104	110	214

The total carrying capacity of the East Davies Allotment is 548 AUMs. The average actual use from 1993 to 2003 is 352 AUMs. The average actual use per pasture for this period is as follows:

Lower: 179 AUMs
Balkan Basin: 94 AUMs
Reservoir: 79 AUMs

Note: The grazing system described above was set forth in the 1993 AMP. This system was rarely followed; one reason was limited amount of water in the Reservoir Pasture. During these years when water was limited, the Reservoir Pasture and the Balkan Basin Pastures were used in conjunction. The Lower Pasture was split into two pastures by an electric fence that was constructed in 1995. This fence was constructed to improve distribution and utilization patterns throughout the pasture.

The 1993 AMP authorized 40 AUMs of TNR on an annual basis because the Lower Pasture was seeded to Siberian wheatgrass, and the carrying capacity in that pasture had not been adequately determined. This TNR use was to be monitored over the next evaluation period, establishing a reasonable calculation of carrying capacity for the Lower Pasture. Approximately 90 additional AUMs of TNR were issued to treat the wolfy Siberian wheatgrass plants in the Lower Pasture. The TNR was granted so long as utilization levels stayed below the target level of 50 percent. After the first year authorizing the TNR, the percent utilization was under the target level of 50 percent. The TNR was authorized on a yearly basis throughout the evaluation period.

The 2003 evaluation recommends that the permittee may apply for TNR up to 136 AUMs on an annual basis. This was based on averaging the actual use through the evaluation period. The evaluation further determined that the lack of data would not support the increase of the TNR use to active permitted use. The BLM will continue to authorize the TNR on an annual basis, so long as the utilization levels do not exceed 50 percent, and trend remains in a stable to upward condition. Monitoring the pasture until enough data is collected to analyze the impacts of the TNR.

CHAPTER III: DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The affected environment resources would be the same for the proposed action and the no action alternative. The following critical elements of the human environment are not known to be present or would not likely be affected by the proposed action or alternative(s) in the EA, and therefore, will not be analyzed within this document.

Air Quality
American Indian Concerns and Traditional Cultural Properties
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Farm Lands (prime or unique)
Floodplains
Hazardous Materials
Paleontology
Threatened, Endangered, Candidate and Sensitive Species
Water Quality (surface/ground)
Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

The following critical elements and resources are present in the project area and are subject to analysis:

A. Critical Elements

1. Cultural Resources

Approximately 180 acres of cultural resource survey has been completed in this allotment. The probability for finding significant cultural resources on BLM land within this allotment is fair. Upland lithosols, supporting edible root plants, may have attracted prehistoric/historic Indians to the area for root gathering in the spring. If edible roots are available in the area, spring root camps or small tool manufacturing workshops may be present. Additionally, historic or present-day Burns Paiute Tribal members may be interested in the area for root gathering. However, more accessible root gathering locations are located in areas to the north in the Stinkingwater Mountains and would be preferred for contemporary use.

Because we do not have adequate knowledge of the cultural resources in this allotment, we are not in a position to adequately evaluate these resources for this undertaking. Inventorying livestock congregation areas, perennial water sources and depositional landforms is a high priority for filling this data gap.

2. Migratory Birds

Several species of migratory birds are known to use the allotment for nesting, foraging, and resting as they pass through on their yearly migrations. Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, and loggerhead shrike, all of which are Birds of Conservation Concern for the Great Basin Region, are expected to inhabit the allotment.

3. Special Status Species-Fauna

There are no known Federally listed Threatened or Endangered wildlife species found within the allotment. Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus phaois*) are expected to occur in the allotment. There are no known lek sites within the allotment or in the general area around the allotment. All of the Balkin Basin Pasture and approximately 75 percent of the Reservoir Pasture is considered probable sage-grouse habitat with uncertain usage. Most of the Lower Pasture is considered historical habitat but currently unsuitable due to fire and crested wheatgrass seedings.

4. Noxious Weeds

The Lower Pasture has some major noxious weed issues. Due to its proximity to State Highway 78, new weed introductions are highly likely.

The following noxious weeds have been found and treated in this pasture: diffuse knapweed, medusahead, whitetop, and perennial pepperweed.

Diffuse knapweed is the biggest problem and it has expanded very rapidly within the Lower Pasture. It moved into the early seral area of the Lower Pasture that had responded poorly to the Siberian wheatgrass seeding in the 1980's. It has been treated for the past 3 years (since 2000) and the infestation is significantly reduced.

B. Noncritical Elements

1. Livestock Management

The East Davies Allotment has 110 AUMs of active permitted use with 104 AUMs of exchange of use for a total of 214 AUMs. There has been 136 AUMs of TNR use licensed every year during this evaluation period. The permittee, Martin Davies, grazes cattle on the allotment. Currently the grazing season for this allotment is from April 1 to October 20. The actual use summaries show that the majority of the time, the permittee stayed within these dates, however, use within these dates varied annually.

2. Soils

Soils range from silty loam with 2 to 20 percent slope, silty clay loam with 20 to 40 percent, and rock outcrop sites with 20 to 60 percent slope. The wind erosion hazard is low and the water erosion hazard is low to moderate. The soils are moderately well to well drained.

3. Vegetation

The dominant vegetation communities are Wyoming sagebrush/Idaho fescue/bluebunch wheatgrass/Thurber's needlegrass and low sagebrush/ Idaho fescue/bluebunch wheatgrass/Thurber's needlegrass. Other vegetation found in the allotment is bluegrass, cheatgrass, and a variety of forbs.

4. Wildlife

The East Davies Allotment supports a diversity of wildlife including mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, various small mammals (rodents, rabbits, coyotes, etc.), reptiles, and birds. Approximately 80 percent of the allotment is classified as mule deer winter range, with the most critical part of the allotment being the Reservoir and Balkin Basin Pastures.

5. Recreation

The area receives some recreational use in the form of hunting big game species such as deer and antelope. Public access is difficult to BLM land because of private land in the lower elevations.

6. Socioeconomics

The highest individual agricultural sales revenue in Harney County is derived from cattle ranching, which is inextricably linked to the commodity value of public rangelands. According to the Harney County Web site, "the cattle industry is counted on to provide an average of $28,000,000 per year to the economy of the county" (www.harneycounty.com 2003). In addition, nearly half of the county taxes come from the ranching community (www.harneycounty.com 2003).

CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Proposed Action

1. Critical Elements

a. Cultural Resources

The proposed AMP would change the season of grazing from spring and summer use to mostly winter with periodic spring use. This timing will distribute livestock more evenly over the allotment and use of the uplands should be greater than under a spring/summer grazing system. Unfortunately, the winter/early spring grazing can result in more widespread trampling effects due to the soft soils at that time of the year. Again, we know very little about the cultural resources of this allotment. To mitigate the general problem of insufficient knowledge of the presence and types of cultural resources, their condition and the types of impacts they may be receiving, a sample of the allotment should be inventoried. This sample should include livestock congregation areas where they coincide with landforms that are most likely to contain significant cultural sites.

b. Migratory Birds

The reduced grazing during the nesting season would reduce disturbance to nesting migratory birds. This would result in fewer disturbances of nests, nestlings, and fledglings and would be beneficial when compared to current management. The winter grazing in the Lower Pasture is also expected to improve range condition in the pasture. In general habitat conditions for migratory birds will improve as rangeland health improves in the pasture. The expected increase in bunchgrasses over the long term in the allotment would favor grassland birds such as vesper sparrows and horned larks.

c. Special Status Species-Fauna

There are no known effects to Threatened or Endangered wildlife species under this alternative. The proposed action would have effects on sage-grouse and their habitat. The proposed grazing system will rest either the Balkin Basin or Reservoir Pasture during the growing season every year. This will allow for good forb production on at least one of these pastures every year. Sage-grouse will also benefit if the proposed system is successful at preventing the spread of weeds and eliminating existing weed populations. Under the proposed system it is unlikely that the Lower Pasture will return to sage-grouse habitat.

d. Noxious Weeds

The proposed grazing system should maintain vigorous, competitive plant communities which would be more resistant to noxious weed introduction and spread.

2. Noncritical Elements

a. Livestock Management

The proposed grazing season would improve the distribution of cattle throughout each pasture. This improvement in distribution would result in more even utilization patterns and would lessen the possibilities of severe utilization.

b. Soils

The proposed grazing season would occur during the winter and early spring when the soils have a potential to be wet and would possibly cause some compaction of the soil, however, with improved distribution there may be less compaction due to the livestock not being restricted to just bottom areas during the majority of the grazing season. The majority of the time the soils would be expected to be frozen and, therefore, no compaction of the soil would occur.

c. Vegetation

The proposed grazing management is expected to have an upward trend with increases in cover and composition in species such as Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and perennial forbs (see range site descriptions for specific sites, available at the Burns District Office).

d. Wildlife

Wildlife species which utilize bunchgrasses are likely to benefit as a result of the proposed grazing system. Grazing during the late summer and fall is likely to increase under the proposed grazing system. This may result in an increase in utilization levels on bitterbrush. The increase utilization rates on bitterbrush would have a severe impact to mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and other species that utilize bitterbrush. However, if it is determined through monitoring that the grazing system is having a detrimental impact on bitterbrush, then the bitterbrush stands will be excluded from cattle by fencing or changing the season of use. Thus, the proposed action should maintain or improve wildlife habitat on the allotment.

e. Recreation

The proposed action will improve rangeland health and benefit big game species, which will increase the recreational value of the allotment.

f. Socioeconomics

The number of livestock grazing public land in the Three Rivers resource planning area would continue to be the same. Implementing the proposed action would result in a continued ranching livelihood for the livestock operator and enhancement of the economy of Harney County would be maintained.

B. No Action Alternative

1. Critical Elements

a. Cultural Resources

Late summer grazing can impact cultural resources in areas where livestock congregate and the ground surface is churned up. Features such as hearths and artifacts can be damaged or destroyed if subjected to the surface and subsurface churning at congregation areas. Such areas are often associated with watering places such as springs and streams. Sites in upland settings, away from water sources are less likely to be affected by summer grazing as livestock tend to focus on riparian settings in the summer. However, we know very little about the cultural resources of this allotment. To mitigate the general problem of insufficient knowledge of the presence and types of cultural resources, their condition and the types of impacts they may be receiving, a sample of the allotment should be inventoried. This sample should include livestock congregation areas where they coincide with landforms that are most likely to contain significant cultural sites.

b. Migratory Birds

Much of the grazing in this allotment would continue to occur during the nesting season which may cause disturbance to nesting birds. Birds that favor grasslands, such as vesper sparrows and horned larks, may see a decrease in habitat quality as repeated early graze treatments can have a negative impact on bunchgrass communities. If sagebrush and other shrubby species have a competitive advantage over bunchgrasses as result of this system, then there is likely to be an increase in habitat for species which nest in sagebrush. However, many of the species that nest in or among sagebrush are also favored by having a healthy understory of bunchgrasses.

c. Special Status Species-Fauna

There are no known effects to Threatened or Endangered wildlife species under this alternative. The no action alternative would have effects on sage-grouse and their habitat. The grazing system under the no action alternative will rest either or both of the Balkin Basin and Reservoir Pastures during the growing season every year. This will allow for good forb production on at least one of these pastures every year and on both of these pastures every third year. However, sage-grouse and their habitat will be negatively impacted if the system under the no action alternative promotes noxious weed establishment.

d. Noxious Weeds

The current grazing management is not maintaining vigorous, competitive plant communities in the Lower Pasture, which provides the opportunity for invasive species to become established and possibly spread. Noxious weeds would continue to increase under the no action alternative.

2. Noncritical Elements

a. Livestock Management

With the current grazing management, the cattle are poorly distributed. Utilization is heavier in places while others are under utilized. Poor distribution of cattle increases the risk of severe utilization.

b. Soils

Most compaction would be avoided, because grazing would not take place during the wet season. However, with distribution limited, compaction within certain areas (such as close vicinity of water, and bottomlands) may increase.

c. Vegetation

The 2003 evaluation states that in the Lower Pasture the current grazing management is not promoting healthy plant communities, nor reaching the allotment objectives, creating a downward trend in the lower half of the pasture.

d. Wildlife

Under the no action alternative grazing treatment will remain the same.

Utilization levels on bitterbrush are a problem. This system may have a negative impact on species which utilize grasslands as repeated growing season graze treatments can have a detrimental effect on bunchgrass communities.

e. Recreation

The rangeland health in the Lower Pasture will continue to decline under the current grazing management. This decline will not favor the big game species causing a decrease in the recreational value.

f. Socioeconomics

The number of livestock grazing public land in the Three Rivers resource planning area would remain the same. Implementing the no action alternative would result in sustaining the operators ranching livelihood and the economy of Harney County.

CHAPTER V: CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts from the proposed action on resources analyzed in Chapter IV are anticipated to be minimal. Past and existing land uses and disturbances in the general area including past livestock grazing practices, the introduction of noxious weeds and wildfire have resulted in long-term changes to the plant communities which will exceed the current evaluation period to restore to healthy rangelands.

The no action alternative would continue to promote the over utilization of the bottomlands, and under utilization of the uplands in the Lower Pasture. Grazing the bottomlands would cause the rangeland trend to continue to decline, giving annuals the opportunity to increase in abundance. Also, the current grazing system would allow noxious weeds to increase, and rangeland health would continue to decline.

CHAPTER VI: LIST OF PREPARERS AND CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Preparers

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B. Consultation and Coordination

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